REUBEN BARABBAS.

"Sixty per cent.," said Reuben to my lord,
"To save your honor! 'Tis not much to pay,
I'd make it only fifty if I could;
But money's scarce, and life's a lottery,
And your old father may outlive his son.
You can't afford it? Well, no more can I
Afford to run the risk on lower terms;
And if you can't, you can't; and so good-bye."
My lord looked angry, but was young and rash,
And lingered on his seat, and bit his lip,
And launched at Reuben words of hate and scorn
With fearful meanings. But he signed the bill,
And took the hard-won and degrading cash;
Hard-won, but lightly parted with in bets and play,
And jewelers' and milliners' accounts
For the Aspasia of the passing hour
That held his fancy and his purse in thrall,
Till his mind changed—or hers, more likely still,
In favor of some newer fool than he.

That night, in bed, Barabbas had a dream.
Half-waking and half-sleeping, as he tossed
In feverish restlessness, after a feast
Too gross and heavy for his body's health,
And draughts too many of the sparkling wine
That fraudulent traders sell for Veuve Cliquot—
Pleasant to sip, but poisonous to quaff.
His unquiescent brain was filled with thoughts
That haunted it by night as well as day;
Of gold that he had clutched, and bills as good
That he had straightened out, and piled in sheaves.
To ripen into guineas in their time,
And placed beneath his pillow ere he slept.

He dreamed he labored in the mines of hell,
Naked and feeble, with a golden crown
Firm fixed upon his bald and shiny skull,
With weight insufferable; vainly he strove
To cast it from him in the agony
That burned into his brain, right through the bone.
Fixed to his ankle by a golden chain
He trailed a golden ball, as round and huge
As the death-dealing bombs that iron ships
Belch from their ponderous and gigantic jaws
To battle hostile fleets and armaments,
And mow down men as mowers mow the corn.
This he drew after him at every step,
Goaded by frantic fiends with golden prods
Down to the infernal everlasting mines,
To wield the pick-axe on the stubborn rock;
Scourged, if he stopped a moment in his toil,
By grinning devils, eager and alert.

Fair murmuring streams of limpid water ran
Trickling beside him; but whene'er he stopped,
As oft he did, to gulp the cooling draught,
The treacherous liquor thickened into gold.
Grapes in ripe clusters, or what seemed like grapes,
Hung, red and white, from overhanging vines;
And when he plucked them to refresh his mouth,
And bore them to his palpitating lips,
Some devilish trick would harden them to gold.
The mocking fiends that followed at his heels
Stabbed him with golden daggers sharp as steel
Until the blood drops trickled to his feet
As hard as hail in hyperborean storms,
Rattling like pebbles on the burning ground.

He yelled for mercy. But the insatiate fiends
Lashed him the harder on his quivering loins.
Then they cried "Halt!" and threw him fiercely down,
Back-broken, on the hard and scorching marl,
And harnessed him, as if he were a mule,
With golden chains, and yoked him to a wain
Cumbrous and huge, high piled with granite rocks,
Through which the infernal nuggets peeped and shone
In the full radiance that illumined hell,
And made him drag it. But his limbs forbade,
Until a storm of blows came pouring down
On his nude shoulders and his sinewy loins,
And goaded him to action. It endured
But for one hideous moment, till he fell
Unconscious and exhausted. When he woke,
With shrieks of pain, he found himself alive
Upon the earth which he had done his best
To turn into a hell for other men.

When sense returned he raised himself in bed
And took one long, long gulp of water pure
That stood beside the couch, and thought the draught
Was worth more gold than usury ever scraped
Out of the pockets of despairing fools
Since cruel usury became a trade.

Barabbas still has chambers near Pall Mall,
And carries on as briskly as before
His profitable business. Clients come,
In tempest of their need and recklessness,
To clamor for his brief and perilous aid,
For sake of pleasure in the passing day,
Bought by the woe and wail of future years.
Sixty per cent. is still his minimum:
As for his maximum, why, that's as wide
As the vast oceans and his vaster greed!

But fate is just, and daily makes him feel,
Acutely as he felt it in his dream,
That gold is not the chief of earthly good;
That health and strength, and wholesome appetite,
And sound refreshing sleep and human love
Are worth far more in honest poverty
Than all the treasures mother earth conceals
In her vast bosom. Sleep deserts his bed,
And food distresses him. Rheumatic pangs
Torture his bones, and natural forces fail
To do the commonest behests of life.

Sixty per cent.? Alas! if five per cent.
Of all the common blessings of mankind
Who labor honestly for daily bread
Could be his portion, he'd be rich indeed.
Fate hath her methods with the evildoers;
With her right hand she pours them out the wine,
But with her left puts poison in the cup,
Or from her seeming favorites takes away
More than she gives. This truth Barabbas feels,
The rich Barabbas, envied of the poor;
And will not cease to feel it until death
Kindly dismisses him, without his gold,
To the oblivion of the living tomb
And the Futurity that lies beyond.

—London World.

THE HOUSE OF PERINE.

A Little Child Set in the Midst of Them.

That spring day dawned as calmly upon Burnside as all other days, giving no warning of the stir that it was to bring; and a stir was held in a horror of disgust by the entire household at Burnside. That each day should follow all other days in an unvaried regularity—this was living; any thing else was a mere scramble for existence. And if there were any compensations in the lives of those who thus scrambled, the three Misses Perine and their bachelor brother, Mr. Middleton Perine, did not know it.

"We may congratulate ourselves upon living in the country the year round," remarked Miss Gertrude, the head of the house of Perine; "I am sure I feel sorry for the people who are beginning now to hunt for summer boarding places. Just think, sisters, of the flies at such places, and the children."

"Flies would not be pleasant fellow-boarders, to be sure," replied Miss Patty, who, being the youngest of the three old maids, gave herself frivolous airs, "but as for the dear little chicks in blue sashes, I wish I was boarding in a houseful."

This childishness was leniently overlooked in Patty; what discretion could one expect at forty?

Mr. Perine stepped into his shining drag at precisely nine o'clock. He was never a quarter of a minute out of the way, and women along the road set their cottage clocks by his appearance. He drove the two miles to his city office in exactly seventeen minutes, as he had done for twenty-five years. The ladies Perine betook themselves to their several feminine occupations, for they were industrious women, in a way, and quiet reigned in the hall and parlors. The few flies that had braved an entrance through the shaded windows felt lonely and subdued, and meekly promenaded the ceiling, with no thought of buzzing.

The sound of wheels on the graveled drive about noon brought three heads instantly to the oriel window of the upper hall, and two woolly ones appeared at the side porch.

"Who in the world is coming to see us in a hack!" exclaimed Miss Louisa, in disgust.

"And such a hack!"

"Extraordinary!" cried Miss Gertrude, "there is a trunk, and the wretch is throwing it on my grass as if it were a dirt road. Here, you fellow, there is some mistake; that trunk does not belong here, especially on the grass—here, listen."

But the slouchy hack-driver had evidently gotten his fare, and paid no attention to the shrill, unintelligible voice.

"Sarvent, mistis;" the old gray-headed butler showed signs of excitement about the whites of his eyes; "dar is a young pusson in de parlor, marm. I meks bole to spose she axes yo' comp'ny."

"Is it a lady, James?"

"Well now, mistis, she mought be a lady, by de look of her, and den agen she moughtn't."

"Did she give her name?"

"Lord love yer, mistis," cried the old domestic, forgetting his decorum, "de po' thing cough so she ain't got bref to say nuttin; 'pear like she gwine faint away fo' she could get any word outen her mouf, and I tink I bes come and let on 'bout her."

Before the words were fairly uttered, Miss Patty was at the parlor door. The poor young woman had indeed fainted; the stained handkerchief, the red line on her lips and her ghastly pallor telling the pitiful story. Seated on the rug at her feet was a sturdy, three-year-old boy, in short skirts and bare legs. He was fearlessly investigating the eyes and teeth of the leopard's head, and evidently had no consciousness of any thing unusual in his companion's condition. Perhaps, alas! it was a sight familiar to him. All was confusion and terror in the usually still house. These old maids had never been sick in all their well-regulated lives, and, except for a sort of womanly instinct, had little conception of what ought to be done. A bed, a spoonful of brandy, a cool spray in her face, a doctor—and presently the sunken dark eyes opened, but there was not strength for a single word of explanation, and before sundown another hemorrhage carried off the feeble life that had so suddenly and strangely come into the Burnside household that morning.

The child was too young to tell any thing except that his name was "Wim." He prattled of too-too cars, bridges, of Mamma sick, of itter b'ack doggie at our's home, of tandy in 'e tunk, and such objects of baby interest. Fortunately he did not pine long for his young mother, hidden forever from his sight in a hasty, unwept grave. Doubtless she had been too feeble to give the child much attention, and he seemed quite able to bear the burden of his own existence, finding vivid amusement in every thing around him. There was not the faintest clew to the identity of the dead woman. In her pocket was not even a purse, only a coarse unmarked handkerchief. The shabby little trunk was almost empty, except for a few suits of neatly-made clothes for the boy and a few carefully darned articles of female underclothing, not a letter, not a book, not a scrap of paper anywhere.

"We will keep the child, brother," said Miss Perine, "until you ask advice of some experienced person as to where to place him."

"Yes," assented Mr. Middleton Perine, laughing uncontrollably over Wim's persistent efforts to sit on the smooth convexity of the leather sofa. But, as far as any body knew, Mr. Perine never made a single inquiry of the aforesaid experienced person. The very day after he came to Burnside Wim climbed up, at the risk of all his bones, into the drag, possessed himself of the reins, and gravely announced: "Me dwive 'ou, me big boy," and from this time forth, except when his small humanity was overtaken by measles, or chicken pox, or some of those infantile jailors, not a day passed that small William, as his baby name came to be translated, did not go into town with the old lawyer, coming back with the careful coachman.

There was never a word said amongst the sisters about parting with the child. They even ceased to speculate about his relations, secretly hoping that there were none. I am not sure but that they avoided reading the advertisements under "Lost, Strayed or Stolen." In Wim's tantrums, and he had now and then violent tantrums, he was turned over to Miss Louisa, who was steady in voice and manner, and who, the little fellow soon learned, was master of the situation. Miss Gertrude undertook to feed and clothe him, and did both parts so well that his rosy cheeks stood out for fatness, and he was likely to outgrow more clothes than he could wear out. But Miss Patty was his playfellow, and Mr. Perine his especial chum and confidant. And ah! how strangely the staid, somber, unsociable old house was changed. Pets of various sorts accumulated in yard and stable. Every member of the household resigned some cherished prejudice for the sake of this little stranger, who so quickly learned to say "our's house, me horsie, Wim's Auntie Trude an' Lou and Pat."

On a warm day, later in the season, one of the few visitors that ever sought the society of the Burnside ladies might have been seen turning into the great lawn in a comfortable, old time rock-a-way. One, did I say? There were two, as far as a man and his wife can be counted two people. It was the pastor of the little village Presbyterian church which the Perine family attended, to which they contributed with genteel liberality, but with whose members they did not affiliate in the slightest degree.

"Now, Ruth," said Pastor Mott, who had recently changed his widowerhood's gravity for the cheerful bearing of a bridegroom, "this visit is one of the trials of your lot, to be endured bravely, but fortunately not to be soon nor often repeated. These queer people will invite you into a dull, quiet house, hand you a glass of wine and a homeopathic bit of cake, talk to you in gentle, patronizing voices about their family of past generations, but they will not show any interest in you, or me, or our work, or our neighbors. You will come back into the sunshine feeling as if you had paid a visit to some old family vault."

The new wife twisted up her sweet face into a wry expression, as one does when swallowing a spoonful of bitter stuff, but hastily smoothed it out again as a sudden curve in the carriage road brought them up to the front porch.

"My husband must be absent-minded," said the new Mrs. Mott to herself; "this is not the family he has been describing to me." For the whole household was out on the front porch. Wim had turned one of the carved oak chairs down on its arms, and was sitting astride its venerable back, though the short fat legs could not quite make out to turn the corners. "Pat" was kneeling in front of him playing horsie, her long, heavy plaits of hair serving for reins. Miss Louisa was pretending to read, and Miss Gertrude was knitting a brightly striped little sock, but all three ladies were enjoying the game fully as much as the young driver.

In some confusion the chairs were righted. Miss Patty's braids hastily knotted up, and small William sent out to James, who was watering flowerbeds on the lawn. Of course, the story of the child was told and listened to with deep interest by the visitors.

"Oh, I'm so glad the poor thing got here before she died," cried tender-hearted Mrs. Mott. "Do you think she knew how good you were going to be to her children when she was gone?"

"She knew how kind they were to her, Ruth," said the pastor, gently.

"You do not think we are doing wrong to keep the darling?" asked Miss Patty, eagerly.

"Wrong?" said the preacher; "I do not think any thing about it; I know that inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these, you are following your Master's commands."

There was a little silence, and then Miss Gertrude said, rather huskily: "Of course Brother Middleton put a notice in the city papers, but we were sure from the little fellow's talk that they had come a great way, and there was every evidence that the poor young woman was in a very friendless condition."

Then followed eager talk upon a wide range of subjects connected with babyhood, boyhood and young manhood, until Miss Patty cried with a merry laugh: "Well, I don't think we need set our baby's wedding day yet!"

"Our baby" had been monarch of all he surveyed at Burnside for ten years, when one day a faded, grizzled, unhappy-looking woman, feeble with disease, came to the house and asked to see Miss Gertrude. Burnside was very unlike the secluded, inhospitable place which was first introduced to the reader. That lively, wide-awake, hail-fellow-well-met individual who still called himself Wim, but who now had a right by act of legislature to the title, William Thornwell Perine, had gradually brought Burnside and all its inhabitants into fraternal relations with the whole neighborhood, high and low. This very woman, Sally Rice, was one of his village acquaintances, through her cake and candy shop, and so was known to Miss Gertrude.

"Well, Sally," said the lady in the gently-cheerful tone one always uses to a hopeless invalid, "how are you feeling to-day? Did my beef tea set you up any?"

To Miss Gertrude's surprise, the woman burst into tears. "If yer knowed what a mizable sinner I am, Miss P'rine," she sobbed, "yer wouldn't take no count of me." And after a little soothing, Sally told her story:

"Yer know, Miss P'rine, yer sent for me to lay our that dead woman, what came upon you so suddent. Well, you saw me turn her pocket inside out, and 'twant nothin' there, but when I come to strip her, I finds a pus fastened in her bussom. It had ten dollars in it, an' a letter."

"A letter," gasped Miss Gertrude, turning faint.

"I was orful hard pressed them days, Miss P'rine, and the devil whispered to me I could jes' borrow that money of the dead woman, and nobody be hurt; but oh, you don't know how't has brought me down since." Sally began to weep again. "I 'low it has cost me my soul. I have slaved day and night to make it up, so I could confess my sin and get yer to pray fer me, but I's never been any less hard pressed than I was that day. It's a'most too late now I'm feared." She counted out the money with feverish haste, as if it burnt her fingers.

Ten years before, Miss Gertrude would have sent her to a preacher for spiritual comfort, as being none of her concern, but great depths had been stirred in the old maid's heart since then. Gently, as one might speak to a foolish, frightened child, Miss Gertrude showed poor Sally where pardon was to be found, and after a long visit, the woman went away comforted, leaving the ten dollars and the letter.

Oh! how Miss Gertrude dreaded the letter. She felt unable to open it herself, and thankfully recognized Pastor Mott's now familiar voice in the hall below. He would open the letter and counsel and guide them. But the letter held no sting; on the contrary, it proved the respectable parentage of their boy, without taking any rights from them. It was from an old acquaintance in the West, and dated ten years back. The bearer, it said, was a poor young widow of good character, whose failing health made it impossible for her any longer to support herself. She was going back to her brother, who would be kind to her if she could find him, but she had not heard from him for years. "I give her this letter to you," wrote Miss Gertrude's friend, "begging you to place her in some charitable institution, at least until I can hear from her, in case she fails to find her brother. She is alone in the world except for this brother."

The pastor finished reading and wiped his glasses. "To think," said one of the sisters, "that we should be finding out, after all these years, how our boy came to us."

"I knew all along," said the pastor, significantly.

"You knew!" the sisters cried together.

"Not about poor Sally's letter," he replied; "I only knew this: 'And He took a little child and set him in the midst of them.' "—Elizabeth P. Allan, in Interior.